When I was in junior college, I was the captain of the cricket team. My vice-captain and I had a tough time cultivating not just skills in the team, but also, following for a sport that is not very popular in Singapore.

This is understandable, as it’s football that is followed passionately by many people in the region.

But it is a cause of worry when there is waning interest for the sport among die-hard fans in India, Australia and even England, where cricket has been the national sport since the 18th century.

Increasingly, I hear my cousins in India have stopped watching and playing cricket. My friends in Perth tell me the first-class training facilities there are often unused for weeks and the English would rather watch the Premier League.

Traditional cricket followers may be shying away for a variety of reasons, but one of the most important factors in today’s busy world is time.

A football match often lasts only 90 minutes. Hockey generally produces a result within an hour or so. No wonder they rank much higher than cricket when it comes to the popularity of global team sports.

Limited-overs cricket is one of the few team sports in which a match lasts a full day. And this is the shorter version of the game.

The traditional version, a Test match, can last up to a whopping five days. This was fine in the old days, when spectators had a lot of time on their hands and watching cricket was like a little retreat from daily life.

But in today’s world of packed schedules, sports enthusiasts prefer something that can offer a quick result as well as the necessary adrenaline rush.

It is difficult for a working person to keep track of the cricket scorecard throughout the day. He would rather watch one-hour highlights at the end of the day when he is back home.

The game’s administrators should remain in touch with their audience’s needs, just like a business should cater to the customer.

They have been reluctant to focus on an even shorter version of the game, Twenty20, which lasts only two hours. This is because of the revenue they would lose from the lucrative advertising slots on TV that a full-day match can offer (after every six balls). It’s high time they looked beyond the revenues.

The inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa later this year can be a good catalyst for the game if it is capitalised on.

Another reason for waning interest is simply the lack of competition. For any game to be exciting there has to be a healthy level of competition. Football’s World Cup was won by Brazil, France and Italy the last three times. But in cricket, the Australians have been the world champions for the last 8 years, winning it three times in a row.

Taking nothing away from Australia, there is an outright need for greater competition to attract the general spectator. In the World Cup this year, Australia did not lose a single match on their way to the cup.

The other nations need to learn from them. What is it that they are doing right? Probably the development of the sport at the grassroots.

There is a strong need in cricket for the rise of other nations that can compete at a much higher level. Hopefully, the proliferation of Twenty20 cricket will be a boon for other nations, since it could offer them an edge that they did not have traditionally.

These suggestions have often been raised by various commentators and sports authorities at the international level.

But the International Cricket Council, the governing body of the game, has often shied away from implementing them. It is time for them to wake up and smell the coffee.

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